

Special Report - Nowhere to Turn: Pt. 2

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CALHOUN COUNTY, Mich. (NEWSCHANNEL 3) - Numerous tenant complaints and a laundry list of violations has prompted an investigation into a Calhoun County mobile home park and its general manager.

In our I-Team investigation, Newschannel 3 explores why the problems persist, and why the park may not be the only one with the same issues.

Holes in the floor, missing windows, issues causing burn marks around electrical outlets; there have been sewage leaks, exposed wires, and the list goes on.

Complaint after complaint was lodged against the Triangle Mobile Home Park, and documented with Emmett Township and the Calhoun County Health Department.

General Manager Steve Ramirez tells us the allegations are the result of disgruntled tenants who failed to pay their rent, and as a result were evicted.

But a former maintenance worker tells us he's seen it all first-hand.

"I've actually fell through a couple floors while I was there and, you know, we just had to fix it," said Chuck Hammer.

Chuck Hammer started working at the park in early 2011, but said he was never licensed or certified to do the work.

Ramirez would not talk with us on camera, but tells us he's not sure whether Hammer was licensed. He says another employee who handled much of the work did have a license. And Hammer tells us he's well aware of the sewage issues.

"They'll back up in their bathtubs and their toilets because you have 75 trailers running on one system, and when that

system backs up, there's no where else to go but into people's houses," he said.

He says he often tried to fix the issues with the septic system, but never had the proper equipment, and at one point was sprayed with sewage when he finally unclogged the system.

"A 1930s septic system is nothing but felt paper basically. so you know--trees would grow through it, but he didn't want to provide the funds to correctly fix it, we had to work with what we had," Hammer said.

According to Ramirez, a professional company was brought in to handle the septic issues, but his employees helped with the labor, and always with proper equipment.

In 2012, Legal Services of South Central Michigan, a group providing free legal representation, filed a formal complaint with the state.

The complaint states that Hammer, at the direction of Mr. Ramirez, had disconnected the trailer from the sewage system entirely so that the waste would spill out onto the ground.

It's an allegation that Ramirez called "a bold-face lie."

"The first time I heard of him was January of '05 when the water was cut off," said former tenant Michael Kribbs, who spoke with us by phone from Lakeland, Florida.

According to legal services documentation and media reports, it appears Ramirez is involved with several mobile home parks across the U.S.

Kribbs lives in the Melody Acres Mobile Home Park, which Ramirez tells us he used to run.

"He tried to tell us to pile the garbage up in our own yards and i wouldn't do that," Kribbs said.

Ramirez contends that's just another lie.

A complaint filed by legal services says "despite being cited by the State of Florida more than 15 times, Mr. Ramirez never obtained a license for the park."

It goes onto say the park was continuously plagued by backed-up sewage, busted pipes and sinkholes. And it doesn't end there.

Ramirez is also the General Manager of Shady Acres, in Flint.

Video taken by our CBS affiliate in Lansing reveals the same issues as the other parks.

And then there's Life O'Riley, in Lansing; another park, previously managed by Ramirez.

Life O'Riley was shut down in February of 2014, as a result of "alarming sanitation and public health issues."

Prompted by the conditions at Life O'Riley, State House Representative Andy Schor re-introduced a bill that would allow more oversight of mobile home parks.

It's expected to be taken up by the House this month, and will then head to the Senate.

Both Emmett Township and the Calhoun County Health Department have been to the Triangle Mobile Home Park numerous times over the years.

Attorneys for the township have launched a formal investigation, to look into possible criminal matters.

It will hand over its results to the Attorney General's office.

The Health Department tells us it needs an imminent health hazard to shut the park down, something it says it doesn't have right now.

The I-Team asked the state--specifically the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs--why, despite numerous violations, it has not closed the park.

A spokeswoman says currently they have no complaints, and any prior complaints were closed when corrections were made to address the violations.

